

Compulsive Behaviors

Many people who are substance dependent enter treatment just to stop using a certain drug. They do not intend to change their lives entirely. When they enter treatment, they are told that recovery requires making other changes in the way they live. The lifestyle changes put people in recovery back in control of their lives.

In what ways was your life out of control before you entered treatment?

Have you noticed yourself behaving excessively in any of the following ways?

- Working all the time
- Abusing prescription medications
- Using illicit drugs other than the one you entered treatment for
- Drinking a lot of caffeinated sodas or coffee
- Smoking
- Eating foods high in sugar
- Exercising to the extreme
- Masturbating compulsively
- Gambling
- Spending too much money
- Other: _____

What changes have you tried to make so far? _____

Does the following sound familiar? “I stopped smoking and using drugs. It was hard. Then one day I gave in and had a cigarette. I felt so bad that I had messed up, I ended up using.” This pattern is called the “abstinence violation syndrome.” Once you compromise one part of your recovery, it becomes easier to slide into relapse.

Do you have a similar story from the past? What event led to your relapse?

What major lifestyle changes are you making in recovery?

Is it uncomfortable for you to make these changes? Yes ____ No ____

Are you avoiding being uncomfortable by switching to other compulsive behaviors? If so, what are they? _____

Are there changes you still need to make? If so, what are they?

Relapse and Sex

Like substance use, high-risk sex is controlled by a trigger process. (High-risk sex includes sex with a stranger, unprotected sex, and trading sex for drugs.) Triggers lead to thoughts of sex. Thoughts of sex lead to arousal and action. For many people, high-risk sex is associated with substance use. High-risk sex can be a trigger for substance use. Engaging in high-risk sex can bring on a relapse to substance use.

What are some of your triggers for substance use? _____

What are some of your triggers for high-risk sex? _____

Have you experienced a relapse when sex was a trigger to use? _____

Prevention

Once you are aware of the things that are triggers for you, you can take steps to prevent a relapse. Here are some suggestions you can do to prevent a relapse:

- **Prevent exposure to triggers.** Stay away from people, places, and activities that you associate with drug use.
- **Stop the thoughts that may lead to relapse.** Many techniques can be used to do this. Some examples of thought-stopping techniques are the following:

→ **Relaxation**—Take three slow, deep breaths.

→ **Snapping**—Wear a rubberband loosely on your wrist and every time you become aware of a triggering thought, snap the rubberband and mentally say, “No!” to the thought.



→ **Visualization**—Imagine an ON/OFF switch in your head. Turn it to OFF to stop the triggering thoughts.

- **Schedule your time.** Structure your day and fill blocks of free time with activities. You can exercise, do volunteer work, or spend time with friends who do not use drugs.
- **Break your typical pattern.** Take a trip out of town. Go to a movie or watch a video. Go out to eat. Go to a 12-Step or mutual-help meeting at a time you normally would be doing something else.

What are some other things you could do to prevent a relapse?

What do you plan to do next time you're aware of being in a relapse situation?
